

useful for the translation of musicals for stage, but also for the discussion of related fields, such as drama, song or poetry translation. Through my translation and commentary of a music-linked text, I hope therefore that my dissertation sheds some light on the processes that allow a musical to be transposed from one culture to another, adding to the cumulative corpus of similar studies in this field of knowledge.

## 2. Theoretical approaches in the translation of musical-theatrical forms

To analyse musicals in translation it is necessary to review the terminology and theories that link music and translation in the musical-theatrical forms that are eventually performed in translation, e.g. operas, operettas or musicals.

Golomb uses the term Music-Linked-Translation (MLT) to refer to any type of translation that combines music and words, “regardless of its purpose, its 'clients' or users (...), the size of its performing bodies (...), its genres (...), etc” (2005:124-125). Building upon this concept, I will suggest a subclassification of MLT that covers several possibilities depending on the purpose of the translation.

Besides, I will discuss relevant research on the translation of songs with the aim of *singability*, such as Low's Pentathlon Principle (or Approach) (2003/2005), which offers a complete framework to both translate and analyse *singable* translations. However, in a musical, which combines songs with spoken dialogues, it seems adequate to complement a music-related theory such as Low's with a theatrical approach which also takes into account terms such as the play's *performability*, as discussed by scholars such as Bassnett (1998) or the concept of *writing forward* (Johnston, 2013) in theatre translation.

## 2.1. Types of music-linked translation

In musical-theatrical works, words and music may be described as independent entities that have a particular but very close relationship. I will henceforth distinguish between the musical text component (MT) and the linguistic text component (LT) of both the ST and TT to refer to these two diverse, and in this case complementary, semantic systems that can take part in the translation process.

In one of the main trends in MLT research, theorists are interested in the difficulties of translating while conveying the meaning for texts where the MT and the LT are entirely synchronized, e.g., the songs or *sung parts* in a play. Indeed, for Golomb MLT “is not **standard** translation, since it is not a predominantly semantically-oriented preservation of signifieds while replacing the signifiers of one language (...) with those of another” (Golomb, 2005:121) [author’s emphasis]. Accordingly, Apter, in a seminal article that analyses his own translations of operas from several languages into English, notices that this endeavour “presents all the problems of prosody posed by translating a verse drama, plus a number of problems peculiar to itself” (1985:309). In fact, where the translator of a verse drama is able to choose whether he is keeping the form or making up a wholly new one, the translator of an opera for performance is restricted by the form, inherently linked to music, more than by other considerations.

Although the modification of the MT alongside the LT is one of the possible options when carrying out a functional translation of a musical-theatrical play, the accepted practice seldom accepts the modification of music. As Golomb states about opera, it has

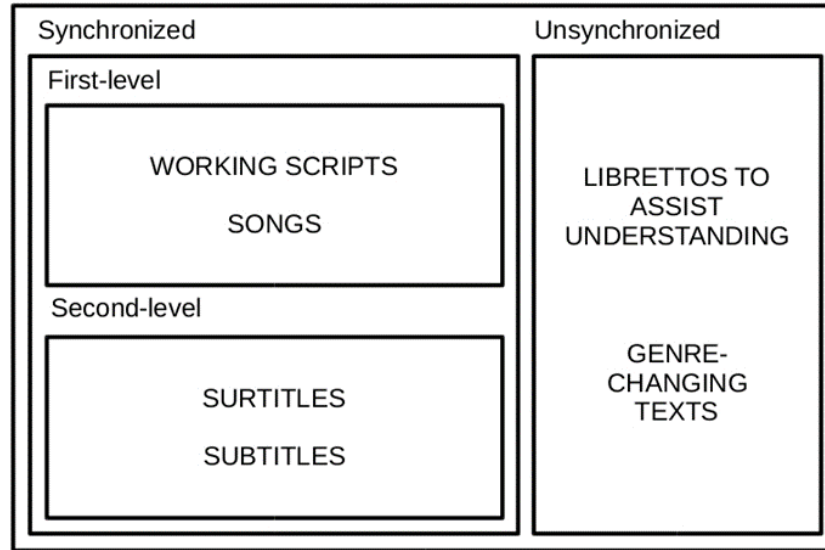
become “a music-based art, part and parcel of the musical scene, much more than it can ever be part of the literary, dramatic and ever theatrical scene” (2005:126). Hence, in this translation tradition, music has come to be untouchable, while words are only translated “in some European countries” (Mateo, 2008:320). In musicals, on the other hand, the source MT is also left unchanged while, regarding the LT, “sung translation is the norm in most target systems, including that of Spain” (ibid.).

As regards to other kinds of translation that use the same type of ST but do not intend to achieve equally-synchronized texts in the TC, I support the view that they also pertain to the scope of MLT. These related types of *non-performable* translations, which obviate the MT, can produce several kinds of TT, such as librettos for the audience, surtitles and even subtitles of specific performances<sup>2</sup>.

Therefore, to explain the MLT phenomena in a theatrical context, it seems useful to consider the following classification of translations that relate to music-linked texts, which divides the translations of musical-theatrical texts into two types (synchronized and unsynchronized) and includes the most common products for each type.

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<sup>2</sup> For instance, a video of the first Broadway production of *Sunday in the Park with George*, filmed in 1986, is available in an amateur-subtitled version posted to the online video repository Youtube (Pico, 2013). In this case, though, the ST, drawing in Elam's definition (1980:2), would be the performance text for that particular recorded performance rather than the dramatic text (original libretto and vocal score) which I will be translating and which in turn served to stage the videotaped performance.



Musical-theatrical MLT Types and Products

According to the figure, First-level MLT would refer to synchronized translations that intend to achieve a TT to be performed, and thus need to fit the same music, as it is the case with the translation of a working script.

Second-level MLT would correspond to loosely-synchronized translations that need a certain time synchronization but do not require the translated LT to go side-by-side so closely with music, such as video subtitles or on-stage surtitles, which in opera allows “the whole audience, not just the elite few, to understand what the singers were singing” (Page 2012:35).

Regarding Unsynchronized MLT, translations would produce unsynchronized TTs, such as audience librettos or narrative translations from synchronized STs. For instance, Low makes the point about German art songs that “most of the translations in existence are non-singable, devised not as general-purpose poetry translations but to assist non-German singers or audiences” (2003:89). There also exists the possibility of translating a musical into another genre such as a novel.

## 2.2. Singability in song translation

Songs can be defined as a self-contained combination of lyrics and music which may express an idea, tell a story or be part of a larger play, and in this form they appear in all kinds of musical-theatrical genres or as independent works. In operas, these sung parts are usually called music-related terms such as *arias* or *recitatives*. In musicals, songs are surrounded by spoken dialogues and instrumental sections. Finally, songs are an important genre in popular music (including musicals), and it is common that they travel between cultures in translation. In any of these sung text-types, the translation task “fits badly into a traditional, linguistic definition of translation” (Franzon, 2005:264).

Franzon considers that “[t]heatrical song translation could be (...) defined as the production of a target text (TT) that resembles its ST in respects relevant to its presentation as a staged narrative to music” (2005:267). It also seems accepted that theories that deal with this subject can also be applied to the translation of art-songs (*Lieds*) or popular songs. In fact, he also asserts that the semantic and factual changes in song translation are “as evident in popular song translation as in musical theatre translation, where greater fidelity to the source text generally would be expected” (ibid.:263).

In the case of art-songs, the specific genre features, i.e. being poems set to music, have not eased the translation difficulties. Whereas one option is receiving the untranslated song as art, disregarding the meaning, the availability of a “[t]ranslation in programme notes or surtitling (...) has become the norm” (Newmark, 2012:67).

When the object of study is popular songs, a completely different set of assumptions may be taken. To begin with, Kaindl discusses the difficulty in defining the

actual ST (2005:241-242) given that translations often can be based on particular performances or recordings. In a type of translation that cannot be studied only by using linguistic and literary tools, he supports an interdisciplinary approach that emphasizes the socio-cultural environment (ibid.:244).

In any case, MLT theories focus on achieving texts that can be sung in the target language (TL). In his prescriptive article about song translation Low proposes “practical strategies for doing such tasks well” (2003:87), under his “Pentathlon Principle”, yet suggesting that “singing songs in translation is a bad idea” (ibid.:88). The article in fact revolves around the concept of *singability*, which aims to achieve, as the title states: *Singable Translations of Songs*. In this approach, “a major difficulty of such translating is the need to balance several major criteria which often conflict” (Low, 2003:191). The five criteria that a singable translation should adequately balance (which I will develop and comment on further in my commentary) are the following ones: Singability, Sense, Naturalness, Rhythm and Rhyme (ibid.:92).

### 2.3. Translation of musical-theatrical works

In a translational action such as the translation of a musical for stage, several constraints and conditions besides music converge to define this particular task. From the theatre studies perspective, the fact that musicals include songs only adds another constraint. Just like in any other dramatic play, decisions must be made to transfer the play’s plot from one culture to another. As a result, under a theatre-related viewpoint, the narrative storylines of the plays and the rewritings or recreations that they may suffer become more relevant alongside singability and may involve “instrumental adaptation and creative reinterpretation” (2005:268), as I will develop further in chapter 5.

### 2.3.1. Terminology in theatre translation

Törnqvist makes use of the term *Transposition* to refer to changes that can occur to a dramatic ST in the field of theatre translation studies. Drawing from Elam (1980:2) he considers that a text can be transposed “from one language to another” but also “from one medium (drama text) to another (performance text)” (1991:7). However, he refers to the first case as *translation* and to the second as *transformation*, meaning “transposing a play from a verbal semiotic system to an aural, visual or audiovisual one” (ibid.).

Going back to musical-theatrical forms, Franzon discusses several views for this kind of translation, such as “creative transposition”, “adaptation” or “indirect translation”, terms that revolve around the concept of fidelity to the ST. In this scale of literary integrity, art-songs would be translated more faithfully, while commercial pop songs would have the opposite treatment and “the genre of musical comedy might be placed somewhere in the middle” (Franzon, 2005:265). He also asserts that “[i]n song translation, adaptation may be the only possible choice” (ibid.). The term “adaptation” is often used instead of “translation” to indicate that the transposition involves further changes besides the language, such as the setting or the era where the action happens, resulting in the fact that “[a] target text not presented as a translation may differ even more” (ibid.), compared to those that are consciously presented as “adaptations”.

The discussion about the acceptability of the term “translation” to encompass such different translation types is yet to be finished and it is not the purpose of this dissertation to have a say in this issue. However, it seems useful to term the translation that I intend to undertake and comment as a “creative transposition” (Jakobson, 1958:118), as it

involves, besides a change of language, the need of creative solutions to solve considerable constraints.

### 2.3.2. Performability and performativity in musical-theatrical plays

Focusing on theatre translation, one of the approaches that guides research is the aim for performability. Although Bassnett does not seem to agree with the term when she says that “it has crept into use” (1998:96), the concept offers a platform around which to explore the translation of dramatic texts. In her analysis, performability “allows the translator to take greater liberties with the text than many might deem acceptable” (ibid.). Indeed, it seems very applicable to MLT, in the same way as to drama translation. In Bassnett's words, performability

justifies translation strategies, in much the same way as terms such as 'adaptation' or 'version' (...) are also used to justify or explain certain strategies that may involve degrees of divergence from the source text. (ibid.)

Other theorists such as Johnston are interested in the concept of translation as performance, or the “performativity” of the translation, which unlike “performability” as a goal, studies the translation as part of the theatrical set's preparation, stating that

the text itself is subject to processes of reading and interpretation in which the emphasis on meaning as becoming makes the translation of that text a performative constituent of the *mise-en-scène*” (Johnston, 2013:366)

To point out this divergent view on translated playtexts on stage, Godard emphasizes how, “when used in respect to the staging of the performing arts, performativity signals



theatricality, thus placing greater stress on the process of playing with behaviour to produce social effects" (Godard, 2000:329). Besides, from Aaltonen's affirmation that "[a]ll theatre practitioners are involved, to some degree, in the rewriting of a text for a particular production" (Aaltonen, 2013:385), it can be inferred that the analysis is referring to the performance text, i.e. the final result including the input of the author, the translator and the entire theatre company.

Johnston, in turn, argues that "the final assemblage of the play on stage is intelligible not in terms of original intentions but depends rather on the concluding perspective of the spectator" (2013:365-366). Hence, a translation with the pragmatic aim of achieving a performable dramatic text will eventually end up being also one of "the individual constituent processes at work in the performance" (ibid.:366). In a similar approach focused in MLT, Low affirms that

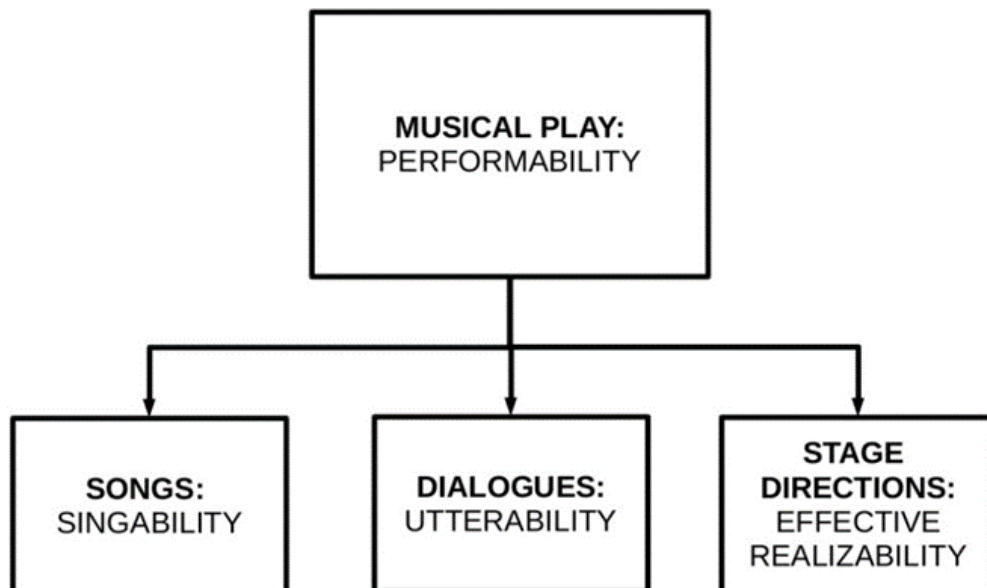
a translator would be unwise to take an approach which concentrates on loyalty to the author and focuses narrowly on the characteristics of the TT. It is much more practical to adopt an approach which looks forward to the future function of the TT and stresses the importance of its end-purpose" (Low, 2003:184)

For Bassnett, in contrast, "the written text is not fundamental for performance but is merely one element" (Bassnett, 1998:99) which dismisses taking into account the network of relations that involves putting a text on stage. For her, "how that written text is going to integrate into the other sign systems (...) is a task for the director and the actors" (ibid.).

Even if not having access to the theatrical company, that does not preclude taking the stance that the translator must have the text's function in the mind at all times. Thus, Johnston's affirmation that "[t]he theatre translator needs to eke out language in its

performative context, to write forward, to bring the potentials for performance that are encoded in the original" (Johnston, 2013:366) is relevant in my argumentation. The "write forward" concept seems a useful way to focus on a translation that attains the intended performability, going further from the text.

The text of a musical, as I will explore further in chapter 3, is composed of the union of unequal puzzle pieces: musical numbers<sup>3</sup>, dialogue and stage directions that join to make a whole. Therefore, the theatrical view of the genre suggests that translation for the stage, the main goal of which is "to be performed", can be subdivided into subpurposes for each part of the ST. The songs' purpose may be listed as *"to be sung"* (singability), the dialogues' purpose *"to be uttered"* (utterability) and finally the stage directions *"to be effectively realizable"* (effective realizability). The figure below represents the general goal and its subdivisions according to this viewpoint.



Goals and subgoals for the functional translation of a musical play

<sup>3</sup> Musical numbers may be songs or instrumental sections.

### 3. *Sunday in the Park with George* (1987)

In this chapter, I will explain the materials that I used to translate and research the case, and the characteristics that made me choose this musical as source material for the case study of my dissertation, being a text especially suitable to reflect on the creative process in translation, because of its reflective nature, as I will argue below.

When Sondheim and Lapine created *Sunday in the Park with George*, (SPG henceforth) they “entered their collaboration with reputations for innovative, unconventional work” (Kakutani, 1984:1) which enabled them to avoid some of the commercial constraints and work in a freer environment. The musical was actually developed as a work in progress in *Off Broadway*<sup>4</sup>, where they “were able to circumvent the economic pressures and high-visibility of usual Broadway tryouts; and present their show to a small audience, limited to the theater's subscribers” (ibid.:2). By means of this freedom, they produced a musical about and around art. SPG turned out to be, besides its recognised artistic qualities (it was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1985), “a stunningly literate and innovative production that lasted 604 performances” (Riddle, 2003:135).

#### 3.1. Plot, structure and intersemiotic travels

SPG is structured in two acts that function almost independently from each other, being set in two different times and places. The first act shows the painter Georges Seurat and his relationships during the creation of the picture *Un dimanche après-midi à l'Île de la Grande Jatte*. The second act deals with Seurat's grandson, “facing the same sort of

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<sup>4</sup> “A term applied to theatrical productions of a dramatic or comedic nature, musical or otherwise, that are presented in smaller houses peripheral to the main theatre district in New York” (Riddle 2003:170)

challenges as his forebear" (Riddle 2003:135). However, what is actually central to the plot is the creation process, as seen by its creators.

The musical itself explains how Seurat developed a new style of painting: "[h]e found by painting tiny particles, color next to color, that at a certain distance the eye would fuse the specks optically, giving them greater intensity than any mixed pigments" (ST:42,1-3)<sup>5</sup>. Hence, using small dots of colour he could compose the image from a limited palette of elements. Sondheim and Lapine's initial idea was employing procedures and techniques originating in painting, such as the use of small particles that characterizes pointillism, to transpose a static visual art work such as a picture, into a dynamic musical theatre play, full of music and movement.

Western classical musicians have often thought about translating ideas from one art form to another. For instance, Minors stresses how the musician Satie "thought in terms of translation occurring beyond verbal language" (2013:107) hence it is possible to find in Satie's compositions such as *Sports et Divertissements* (1914) the links between his visual sketches and his musical language. In a similar way, SPG, as a play depicting an intersemiotic interchange, shows the links between visual arts and musical language that take place in this case.

### 3.2. Materials for the translation

The texts used to perform a musical are not usually self-contained in a single document. Instead, different members of a theatre company may use different texts to undertake their tasks. In Riddle's words,

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<sup>5</sup> References to the ST/TT henceforth given in the format: (ST/TT: page/s, lines/s).

the book is defined as the overall package of the plot, dialog and characterization, and the way in which these elements are combined and interrelated. The music and lyrics are treated as separate elements. The actual dialog and lyrics are combined into the working script, called the libretto (Riddle, 2003: 28).


In the case of SPG, there are indeed different published texts that cover the components of the musical (Sondheim's music/lyrics and Lapine's book). For the performable translation that I intend to achieve, I will thus rely on two complementary sources that together provide all needed text: the published script, (Sondheim/Lapine, 1991) which includes dialogues and stage indications but also lyrics, and the *Vocal Score* (Sondheim/Lapine, 1987) —VS henceforth— which besides the musical score (divided in musical numbers) includes lyrics and stage indications. The image below is an example of a VS section including dialogues, stage indications and sung interventions.

GEORGE:  
Chromolume. I've been invited by  
the government to do a presentation  
of the machine on the island.

MARIE:  
George has never been to France.

GEORGE:  
(To audience) *mf*

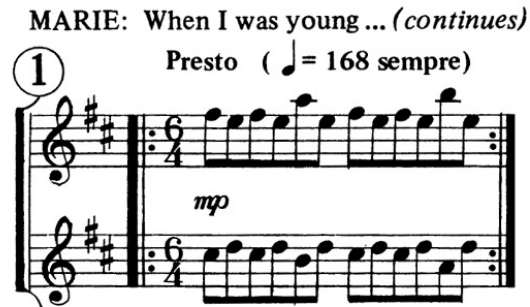
(He raises a cutout  
of himself in front  
of Billy and Harriet)



Art is-n't eas-y --

(VS:171)

However, in the VS only part of the dialogues are included, and are sometimes indicated as “(*continues*)”, such as in the following example, which justifies the use of the published script besides the VS.



(VS:151)

Although most of the LT can actually be extracted from the script and, being a later document, will be given preference in case of discrepancy, the VS is also needed in order to achieve singable translations of the songs. Besides, it is possible to find a few differences between the texts published in the script and in the VS. Changes range from small nuances such as "We're ready, Bob" (ST:46,13) instead of "We're (DEFINITELY) ready, Bob" (VS:151), to adding several dialogue lines (ST:34,5-8), or even technical indications only included in the VS about the synthesizers and music elements to use in the production (ST:46,2-11).

Therefore, the ST for my translation and commentary will be the result of joining both the script and the VS, reconstructing in this way the SC working script, and allowing the Spanish company to perform the musical using this TT. The particular section I chose for the translation covers the first three numbers of the second Act, the names of which in the VS are: "It's Hot Up Here", "Chromolume #7" and "Putting It Together". This section includes a profound reflection on art and interesting relationships between the LC and the MC, which are relevant to my line of work and will be commented on in chapter 5.

### 3.3. Studying one's own work

SPG deals with art, the process of creation, obsession and translation. In the first Act, a resolute Georges Seurat tries to develop new techniques for his art, in a repetitive and self-absorbing process. In the second Act, the grandson of Seurat, also called George, is a late 20th century artist who continues the pursuit of his ancestor, trying to understand how art is conceived and how the artist's economic troubles affect his results. Both main characters in the play can thus be seen as creators and at the same time translators, trying to transform light into art, Seurat into painting and George into light-sculptures.

McMillin explains that

Sondheim writes musicals that are about musicals even when they are also about something else (...) [H]is shows reflect on their own conventions and become commentaries on the aesthetics of the form (McMillin, 2006:xii).

On these grounds, it is arguable that Sondheim and Lapine are offering us an insight into their own creating methods, experiences and fears. Hence, a musical that represents a self-reflection about the complete process of creation, from its inception up to the moment that the piece has to be sold, seems perfectly fit to be chosen as a case study that enables us to reflect in turn about how art travels to another culture through translation and recreation. Jones, in his analysis of poetry translation considers that, although books, articles and translators' introductions on the subject

typically describe specific target-text solutions for specific source-text problems, they can also reveal that translator's working principles and preferred strategies. And by comparing several reports, one can highlight the working norms of translators in a certain place and time (Jones, 2011:10).

With the definition of a detailed Skopos for the translation, this dissertation has attempted to replicate the conditions of a “real life” case. However, some inherent constraints complicate this endeavour. In a case study framed in “the real world”, i.e. the analysis of a published libretto translation, several translators might be involved in the project, the same way that several creators were involved in the creation of the original musical. Aaltonen highlights the various subjectivities that take part in the staging of a musical by asserting that “[a]ll theatre practitioners are involved, to some degree, in the rewriting of a text for a particular production” (Aaltonen, 2013:385). However, it might be argued that if a single translator undertakes the task, its coherence may be expected to be high, although the rest of the practitioners in the final staging will arguably still add their contributions to the performance text.

Besides, although the study of one’s own processes is not devoid of doubts about its objectivity, a methodological tool that has been used to overcome some of these limitations is the research diary -in this case the translation diary, which Lamb considers “provides a window into [the translator’s] experience through personal reflection”(2013:34). Therefore, the diary generated during the translation will be used as a research source to collect data about the difficulties and decisions taken during the process. It is thus to be expected that the diary will provide valuable insight, delving into the processes that have been undertaken in this particular translation, enabling me to arrive at conclusions and write the translation’s commentary in a manner as objective as possible.